

## **VETERANS HISTORY PROJECT**

**Veteran's Name:** Roy Milks

**Interviewer:** David Meyer (O'Shea)

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**Transcriber:** Carol Slezak

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**Edited by:** Teresa Bergen

**David Meyer:** Well I always start this out remembering my father. And I say, hi, this is David Meyer, son of Earl D. Meyer, Company H, 379<sup>th</sup>, 95<sup>th</sup> Infantry. And today is August 6, 2010, and it is now about eight o'clock, 8:30. And I have the great pleasure today of talking with – Mr. Milks, could you say your name?

**Roy Milks:** Roy Milks.

**Meyer:** Let me make sure that—yeah, okay, you're miked nicely. And what's your birth date?

**Milks:** October 31, 1921.

**Meyer:** Nineteen twenty-one. Halloween.

**Milks:** And so I'm 88 now, yes.

**Meyer:** Eighty-eight years old. And where were you born?

**Milks:** Midland, Michigan.

**Meyer:** Where's that?

**Milks:** That's, oh, a hundred, 125 miles north and west of Detroit.

**Meyer:** Okay. North and west of Detroit. And what company were you with in the war?

**Milks:** I was with Battery A, 920<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery Battalion.

**Meyer:** 920<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery Battalion. What was your final rank?

**Milks:** PFC [Private First Class].

**Meyer:** PFC.

**Milks:** Yes.

**Meyer:** And just a few questions before, just in background. Do you remember what you were doing when you heard about the Pearl Harbor attack?

**Milks:** I was in my freshman year of college. The house where I lived in, I started looking at the Sunday paper and I heard it over the radio about the Pearl Harbor attack. And they did not have much information. But of course we started receiving more and more information during the day, and we were all just tied to the radio listening to it.

**Meyer:** What college were you in?

**Milks:** Michigan State.

**Meyer:** Michigan State.

**Milks:** Yes.

**Meyer:** Is that in Detroit?

**Milks:** That's in East Lansing, Michigan.

**Meyer:** East Lansing. Did you think that you were going to go?

**Milks:** Oh yes. I think, like a lot of young guys then, I think that within the next few weeks-- First, I was young enough I had to get permission. But I talked to my folks, I wanted to enlist in the Air Corps at that time. And I took an examination for that. And after taking the written exam I was called to Selfridge Field near Detroit, to take a physical. And unfortunately I did not, because of a knee injury, I did not pass the physical.

**Meyer:** The air force. So it wasn't your eyes, it was your knee?

**Milks:** Knee, yes.

**Meyer:** That's interesting. That they would care about the knee.

**Milks:** Well, I was applying for pilot's training, and it was something that they were afraid would fail, I guess.

[TIME 3:47]

**Meyer:** Okay. Did you know you had a problem with your knee?

**Milks:** Oh yes, yes, yes. I had had medical treatment for it, and had it immobilized.

**Meyer:** Was it like a polio?

**Milks:** No, no. It was a skiing accident.

**Meyer:** Oh, skiing. So you don't get in the air force, so you join the army?

**Milks:** Well actually by taking the exam I actually had enlisted but not passing the physical then I was in what they called the enlisted reserve, and I wasn't called up until several months later. And then I went to basic training.

**Meyer:** Where did you go to basic training?

**Milks:** Camp Wallace, Texas. Near Galveston.

**Meyer:** Near Galveston? My wife always asks, she's curious I think from being in a fairly small family, she said what it's like that first night, when you're there with strangers in a big room or whatever it is? Do you make friends easily, or do you keep to, what was it like for you?

**Milks:** I don't know. I wasn't reluctant. I felt pretty much at ease except that first night a bunch of us came in and I was surprised that some of the guys had suitcases and pajamas and things like that. And I think I knew enough, I just left home with what I was wearing on my back and nothing else. And we were kidding the guys that were putting on pajamas. [laughter]

**Meyer:** Sure, that's interesting. Of course some people would bring suitcases.

**Milk:** Oh,yeah.

**Meyer:** And would the army just take them away from them the next day?

**Milks:** I think they must have – I really don't know.

**Meyer:** That's great. Thanks. My wife will be very pleased to have that detail. And you went to basic training, where were you?

**Milks:** At Camp Wallace, Texas.

**Meyer:** Did the physical regiment--how was your knee?

**Milks:** Well, by that time it had repaired itself a whole lot and it was doing okay. But ever since that point in time I have had trouble, and I have a knee replacement now. So it never went away completely.

**Meyer:** Never went away completely. So did basic training, did it agree with you? How was it?

**Milks:** At the time I think I liked it. Of course, there were tough times, like anything else. Nothing was ever easy, but overall I liked it. I was pretty enthusiastic about basic training.

**Meyer:** Do you have any specific memories of that time – a drill instructor, friends, anything come to mind?

**Milks:** No, not necessarily. The only thing during that time, toward the end of training I was interviewed by a board of officers about going to OCS [Officer Candidate School]. Which I did

not do, but they sent me to a program called ASTP [Army Specialized Training Program]. So after basic training three months, I went to the University of Pittsburgh.

**Meyer:** What did they have you study?

**Milks:** Engineering. [laughs]

**Meyer:** Did you have a like for engineering?

**Milks:** No, I did not. [laughs] My math skills aren't very good.

**Meyer:** But they knew that you were intelligent, so they [unclear] engineers—

**Milks:** And then of course they closed that program down and I went to the 95<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division as a replacement at Indiantown Gap.

**Meyer:** Indiantown Gap. Now I know from hearing stories on both sides that sometimes when the ASTP people came in, some people might give you a hard time.

**Milks:** There was some resentment I think among certain guys. And the way I always thought about, there were guys older than I was that had actually been in the CCC [Civilian Conservation Corps], and maybe WPA [Works Progress Administration]. And we'd had one year of college, and I think there was some resentment there.

**Meyer:** Sure.

**Milks:** But, on the other hand, I never had any problems.

[TIME 09:17]

**Meyer:** That's well put. It's nice to hear the history, how you thought and how you recognize the history of the CCC, what they'd gone through. At Indiantown Gap did you go to the mountain training, too?

**Milks:** We went to West Virginia mountain training, yes.

**Meyer:** Did you have to climb or rappel?

**Milks:** No. What we did, being in the artillery, what we did mostly was trying to cut trees, and fix roads so our trucks could go over them, and that type of thing.

**Meyer:** When did they assign you to artillery?

**Milks:** Out of the University of Pittsburgh, went to--

**Meyer:** What was your main job in artillery?

**Milks:** Okay, I ended up as a loader on a 105 millimeter Howitzer.

**Meyer:** How many loads are there?

**Milks:** Just one.

**Meyer:** How many men work the Howitzer?

**Milks:** Let's see, there were five of us plus the gun sergeant.

**Meyer:** Is gun sergeant like a supervisor?

**Milks:** Yeah, he was the, well, he was the guy that was commander of the gun, I guess.

**Meyer:** Okay. So is that what you're learning at Indiantown Gap is how to load?

**Milks:** Well, yeah. And primarily, somehow I was assigned to be loader. And they had a guy, one soldier, that prepared the ammunition, and he'd hand it to me, and I would load it. And of course now mostly I'm talking about combat where we were doing a lot of firing, and at a faster rate than we did in training. But it became a kind of very coordinated group of guys, working in unison.

**Meyer:** How heavy was the shell?

**Milks:** As I recall they were 45 pounds.

**Meyer:** So good heft.

**Milks:** Fixed ammunition, or semi-fixed ammunition, and I think it was like 45 pounds. However I'm not--

**Meyer:** It was like lifting a nine-year-old or something?

**Milks:** I suppose, yeah.

**Meyer:** So he would prepare the shell, he would hand you the shell?

**Milks:** I would receive it and turn around and put it in the breech and shove it in.

**Meyer:** And shove it in.

**Milks:** Well, like that.

**Meyer:** And then you'd stand back?

**Milks:** I'd step back, to stay out of the recoil. [laughs].

**Meyer:** And did someone else, was someone else the firer?

**Milks:** Well, the gunner. And he was on the right, and he pulled the lanyard.

**Meyer:** And then it would shoot. And then would you unload the—

**Milks:** And then he would open the breechblock and the shell casings would fly out.

[TIME 12:51]

**Meyer:** Fly out there. Who was your commanding officer?

**Milks:** Well, General Twaddle of course.

**Meyer:** General Twaddle. But in charge of your battery.

**Milks:** Captain Elliott (PH)

**Meyer:** Captain Elliott. Because I've talked to James Woolner, Jim Woolner, he was in charge of a battery but I'm not sure which group he was with. So you're learning how to do this. Then you left Indiantown Gap and you went to, out here?

**Milks:** Well, we came to the Boston area. As a matter of fact, you had asked about mountain maneuvers. We were in West Virginia on mountain maneuvers on D-Day. And the next day we packed up and came back to Indiantown Gap and started getting ready to go overseas.

**Meyer:** So as soon as that happened you knew it was time to move.

**Milks:** Yeah, they obviously knew what to do with us. [laughs] And we came to, I think it was called Camp Myles Standish, here [Massachusetts].

**Meyer:** And somebody said the remnants of it are still someplace. There's some plaque or something.

**Milks:** Oh, are they?

**Meyer:** And what ship did you go over on?

**Milks:** The [USS] West Point.

**Meyer:** How did you handle—I know some people liked traveling by ships. Other people thought—

**Milks:** This may sound dumb, but it was very exciting to me. And my wife and I still take cruises. [laughs]

**Meyer:** Where did you sleep on the ship?

**Milks:** They had bunks that were, I think there were six on top of one another, and had about, I'd say about 18 inches separation. But I have to tell you a story about the cruising. Last year my wife saw in a travel brochure, she said, "Here's a trip I'd really like to take." And it was fly to London, spend a week in London. And then they bus you down to Southampton, you get on the Queen Mary, and come back to the United States. And she said, "I'd really like to do that."

**Meyer:** Oh, sounds great.

**Milks:** And I said, "Irma, just forget it." I said, "Last time I got on a ship in Southampton, next morning I landed on Omaha Beach, and I'm not going to—[laughter]— I'm not going to take a chance!"

**Meyer:** So you weren't in England too long, were you?

**Milks:** I think like just two weeks.

**Meyer:** And then you went over to Omaha Beach.

**Milks:** To France, yes.

**Meyer:** Where was the first sign you saw of war? Did you hear buzz bombs in England?

**Milks:** No, I didn't experience that. And I don't remember seeing any physical damage in England. We landed in Liverpool and went right across to Winchester, I believe it was, yes. And I really didn't see war damage.

**Meyer:** When you came up to Omaha Beach, what did the beach look like?

**Milks:** Well it was, of course it was a broad beach, and we were on a LST [landing ship, tank], and they just drove up to the beach and dropped the front. And by that time, of course, the fighting was far beyond there. That must have been like September.

**Meyer:** September tenth. Was there still wreckage or anything on the beach?

**Milks:** Oh yeah, there was still some wreckage. And I remember the famous Mulberry docking had been destroyed by a storm.

**Meyer:** Oh, so that's why you had to go up—

**Milks:** That's why we still had to land on the beaches.

**Meyer:** The LST, that's good to know. Did you have to climb the cliff to go up?

[TIME 17:54]

**Milks:** Well of course we were in a 6-by-6, pulling our gun.

**Meyer:** That's right.

**Milks:** And they had roads established by then.

**Meyer:** Was there a graveyard there by the time you got there?

**Milks:** Not that I know of, no. If it was, I didn't know about it.

**Meyer:** So what happened after you went to Omaha Beach?

**Milks:** Well, we went near a town called Trevieres, and just went into bivouac. And at that time the American supply lines were really breaking down, is my recollection. And they did not have enough gasoline or ammunition at the front. And they took our trucks and for about two weeks they were just hauling supplies to the front lines.

**Meyer:** On the Red Ball—

**Milks:** Red Ball Express. But we were there like two weeks, and then we joined Patton's Army.

**Meyer:** During those two weeks, what did you do?

**Milks:** Oh, not a whole lot. But we did do a little cleaning up of debris and things, picking up wire and things like that that had been left by the troops. But not a whole lot.

**Meyer:** Interesting. Not a whole lot. And then the order came in to move. I know some of those men, the riflemen, moved in those Forty-and-Eight boxcars. How did you move?

**Milks:** Oh, we went in our gun trucks, of course.

**Meyer:** In your gun trucks.

**Milks:** Yeah. Uh huh.

**Meyer:** Just on the road.

**Milks:** And I don't know how the infantry moved.

**Meyer:** And so, then where did you go?

**Milks:** We spent the first night after we left, we stayed outside of Paris someplace. The next day we went into a combat area, or very close to it, because we were under complete blackout, and we could hear distant firing. In the distance. And then the next day we moved into a position. We relieved another experienced division and went in and took their positions.

**Meyer:** Now as part of your job, did you have to dig in your guns?

**Milks:** Yes. Oh, yeah, we did. Very much.

**Meyer:** What is that like?

**Milks:** Well, you dig them in. Of course, you pile up, make a parapet in front of the guns, sort of a horseshoe shape. And I remember these little things that, one of our sergeants said, Captain Elliott was saying what we were supposed to do – this was before we were in combat. And you know, he said, “You have to protect that gun, and dig in the guns.”

And some sergeant says, “Captain, what about us?”

And he says, “You’re expendable. The guns aren’t.” [laughs]

**Meyer:** In digging in the guns, was that always, when you create the parapet in front of them, are you always digging with shovels?

**Milks:** Oh yeah, shovels.

**Meyer:** Shovels? If there’s like bricks or stuff, do you make that into a parapet? Or you always--

**Milks:** We always used, as far as I recall, we always used just the soil, the dirt.

**Meyer:** And how deep did you go?

**Milks:** Oh, deep enough so we’d have, there’d probably be about, what we dug out and the parapet would probably be about four feet.

**Meyer:** About four feet. And it would be the parapet, the gun behind it, and then you would be — How long would it take to dig in your gun?

**Milks:** Well, I don’t know. We worked pretty fast. [laughs] And sometimes we would be digging it in, and we’d have to stop for fire mission or something like that, occasionally.

**Meyer:** Do you remember the first time you fired your gun at the enemy? Do you remember doing that?

**Milks:** Oh, you know, we first went into combat, we took over the positions of the battery or the division we relieved. And there was a shortage of gasoline, there was a shortage of ammunition. And we were told we weren’t going to be able to fire the guns without direct order. Now there were some artillery, some tanks behind us that were firing over our heads at the Germans. And what happened, I think, in a couple days they came around and they took all but ten rounds of

our ammunition, of our artillery ammunition, and took our extra gasoline. They left us just enough gasoline to retreat if we had to. And they gave it to other units, because there was such a shortage.

**Meyer:** And were you near Metz, or were you in Nancy?

**Milks:** We weren't near Metz at that time.

**Meyer:** Were you in Trevieres?

**Milks:** We were on the French side of the Moselle River. No, we weren't near Metz yet.

**Meyer:** Were you north of Metz, near Thionville?

**Milks:** Yeah, but I think further away than that.

[TIME 25:00]

**Meyer:** Further away.

**Milks:** Yeah.

**Meyer:** I wonder, too, because I know Metz, though I didn't go there, I went to Metz one time, but I remember seeing Verdun on the map.

**Milks:** Yes, we were near, we went through Verdun.

**Meyer:** And so you traveled across the old trenches of—

**Milks:** Yes. And I remember something about Verdun. I got a look at, there was a sign there, and it was saying something about, as far as I could figure out, for cars to not honk their horns because of the dead, to respect the thousands of people that had been killed there.

**Meyer:** That's interesting. And you're traveling through [within the war?]

**Milks:** But you know, where I was, all that, you know, they didn't tell privates very much. [laughs] And I was always curious. But unless you saw a sign or something like that, you really didn't know where you were.

**Meyer:** No. And no one was telling you.

**Milks:** No one was telling us.

**Meyer:** No one was telling us. So you're just going--before we go further, you had originally sat down because you had a story.

[TIME 26:48]

**Milks:** Oh, yeah. Well, this was in November. Late November. It was after Metz. And we'd gone into a new position. And, again, I don't remember exactly where, but General Patton actually visited our division. And so we were told that he said, "These men need a rest." And we were relieved and went back to a little village in France. And we got rid of our old clothes, we had showers, and got new clothing. And as I recall up at that point in time, I hadn't had my clothes off in something like six weeks. [laughter] And we – our gun battery, at least our gun section, some others were in a schoolhouse. And we just slept in the schoolhouse. Which I guess was common there, that upstairs the teacher had a living quarters.

And, anyway, one morning I was going out and she was standing up at the head of the stairs and called me and she asked me to come up to her living quarters. I didn't know what was going on, but got up there and she made something to drink, I don't know what, but she said she wanted to know about. She had a bunch of cutout plaques on her wall, and she says, "My son is a prisoner in Germany, but he made these things out of things he saw in American magazines." And she said she was a teacher. She says "Can you tell me the story about them?"

Well, what these cutouts were in wood, painted, were Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs. And this was – the movie was pretty new then, and I knew the names and the characters, and she said, "Could you tell me the story?"

So I told this French lady the story of Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs, which she recorded. And I remembered the names and the story, pretty much. And I always thought that was a different kind of war story.

**Meyer:** It is, it's a great one.

**Milks:** And, anyway, she was very friendly, and I told her that story and she thanked me. And she wanted to talk to me more, but I think the next day we moved back. Oh, the Battle of the Bulge stuff started. We moved back.

**Meyer:** So, did you speak any French? Or was she--

**Milks:** No, she spoke some English. And I didn't speak French, no. But with her English and waving hands, we-- [laughs] Oh, and I think I wrote the names for her.

**Meyer:** Let's see. What I remember is Grumpy, and —.

**Milks:** Snoopy, and—

**Meyer:** Dopey, and Sleepy, and Sneezy. Do you remember what town you were in?

**Milks:** I think it was called – and I don't know the pronunciation but – F-a-l-c-h, or something like that. But I'm not certain about that.

**Meyer:** Was it in Belgium, or we're still in France?

**Milks:** It was in France.

**Meyer:** That's a lovely story. Do you remember any time you felt nervous, or edgy, or afraid?

**Milks:** Oh yes, yeah. I think my experience was when we first went into combat, there'd be firing and artillery and yeah, I was afraid. But after a while you kind of learn what to be afraid of. Some artillery coming in, you knew wasn't going to hurt you. It was just the sound of it. And it would be either off to the right or left, or over here, or something like that, and you kind of learned when to be afraid, I suppose.

**Meyer:** What did artillery sound like that you did have to worry about?

**Milks:** Well, it was a very short sound. It would be kind of like a zip and a bang.

**Meyer:** Zzzzzzip?

**Milks:** Yeah. Very quick.

**Meyer:** So by the time you heard it you were in danger.

**Milks:** Well, yeah, uh huh. I think that, well the ones that were very close you almost didn't, it was just a very short sound.

**Meyer:** A short sound. Did anything every explode very close to you?

**Milks:** Yes, uh huh.

**Meyer:** You were talking about sometimes you would load very quickly. Would it be like an assembly line? Would you have to worry about the gun getting hot?

**Milks:** There was one time when we were going to cross the Ruhr River, as I remember, that's I think we might have been in Holland, that we opened a barrage at night, about one o'clock in the morning. And they were going to cross the Ruhr to go into, you know, German positions. And we started firing and they just said, "Fire at will." And finally the guns got so hot they had to shut it down. They went to what they call battery right. Number one gun would fire, then number two, then number three, then number four. Then one, two, three, four, to allow the guns to cool off.

**Meyer:** And would aim the gun?

**Milks:** Well, of course the sergeant, gun sergeant would be getting direction from the fire direction center. And there was a gunner on one side, he was setting one setting, which I think was the azimuth. And then there was an assistant gunner on the other side and he was setting the elevation. And they were giving us the charge, the guy that was fixing the ammunition, they'd tell him what charge it was.

**[TIME 35:17]**

There were seven bags of powder in there, and if it was charge three, they'd pull out four bags and discard them. Then they would hand me the shell.

**Meyer:** They would hand you the shell? And you put the charges into—

**Milks:** No, they would have the charges already in there.

**Meyer:** Already in. And were there like phosphorus shells? Were there different kinds of shells?

**Milks:** We had white phosphorous, yes. but most of them were high explosive.

**Meyer:** High explosive.

**Milks:** But we did have white phosphorus.

**Meyer:** How could you tell them different? Did they look the same?

**Milks:** Oh, no. As I recall, they were different color. I don't remember what.

**Meyer:** What did you think of your commanding officers? Sometimes people will--

**Milks:** I don't know. I think that, I had no problem with them. I really thought our captain – and I say this because there were some artillery batteries that were so located that they seemed to get more enemy fire and were hurt by enemy fire more than we were. And I think our captain was pretty good at picking out a good location, protected location. And I can't say I was devoted to him or anything like that, but I respected him.

**Meyer:** And his ability.

**Milks:** Yeah.

**Meyer:** And he kept you safe.

**Milks:** I had no problem with the officers.

**Meyer:** How was the weather that winter? Was it cold?

**Milks:** Well, of course in October and November the weather was terrible. Lot of rain. And then as you know during the Battle of the Bulge, we got in there on the tail end of it, I think. But the weather was miserably cold, terribly cold. And we [lowered up?], went to the Bulge. I remember stopping in a little Belgian town and this house where we stopped this woman came out. She had some hot broth. And gave us, in our canteen cups gave us some hot broth. And that was wonderful. [laughs]

**Meyer:** Were your uniforms good enough to protect you?

**Milks:** Oh, I think so. But sitting inactive in your truck you got cold and it was the feet that bothered us most.

**Meyer:** I was going to ask you, what about your feet?

**Milks:** Well there was quite a few of us, I know I got some numbness in my toes.

**Meyer:** Does it ever bother you still?

**Milks:** No.

**Meyer:** About the artillery, you didn't have any ear protection, did you?

**Milks:** When we first got there, they gave us some cotton for our ears. But then you really couldn't hear the commands very well. And being a bunch of young guys we just wanted to discard that stuff and not worry about it.

**Meyer:** Has it had any effect on your hearing?

**Milks:** Yeah. I have 10% disability because of my hearing. They attribute it to the artillery.

**Meyer:** The artillery. Do you remember where you were when you heard that Roosevelt died?

**Milks:** Yes, very well. I think it was at the Ruhr Pocket. And I was standing guard at the guns. And the guy, sometime in the morning, during the night, the fellow came up to relieve me said that Roosevelt had died. And I remember--

**Meyer:** How did you feel?

**Milks:** Well, I'll tell you exactly what I thought at the time. I think I made the comment to the guy. I said, "You know, I don't know anything about Truman, and I wish that George Wallace was vice president." That was my thought at the time.

**Meyer:** Sure, sure. Someone that you knew something about.

**Milks:** Someone—

**Meyer:** Sure. Because you didn't know who this guy was. With the way Truman acted afterward did he build your confidence? What did you think?

**Milks:** I don't think I really thought too much about it, really. [laughs]

**Meyer:** Going into Metz, just going back a bit, did you enter into Metz or did you stay on the outside?

**Milks:** We were on the outside. I didn't go into Metz until after the Germans had surrendered. And we had some of our people, our forward observers, hurt there. One killed. But we did a lot of , you know, we did a lot of firing in Metz.

**Meyer:** Did you fire at the forts?

**Milks:** You know, I don't know. I think mostly at personnel. But I know in one instance that we were told that their German tanks were advancing in position and they called artillery fire in on those. And almost on top of our own people. Because they were so close.

**Meyer:** They were so close. So close. Where were you, and after you, so you go to the Bulge, then into the Ruhr pocket. Were you part of the group, part of the 95<sup>th</sup> was assigned to the British Army for just a--

**Milks:** Yes, we were. Right after the Bulge we were assigned to Montgomery's – we were transferred to the 9<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, and that was put in Montgomery's, I think it was 22<sup>nd</sup> Army or something like that. And that's where we were when we crossed the Ruhr River, until we got to the Rhine.

[TIME 43:06]

**Meyer:** Did you cross on pontoon bridge?

**Milks:** I think we did, but I don't remember. [laughs] I don't remember. You know, I told you about the – they said we had a thousand artillery pieces within a square mile. And they all fired that night. The infantry crossed. Then we went in the next morning. Of course, there was a lot of devastation. But I suppose we did cross on a pontoon bridge, but I don't really remember.

**Meyer:** Just remember going in.

**Milks:** Yeah.

**Meyer:** Did you know the war was winding down as a private?

**Milks:** I think when we got to the Rhine River, I think that's when I had a feeling that the war was winding down, yeah

**Meyer:** Did you carry anything, like a lucky charm or talisman or anything?

**Milks:** That's a funny thing [laughs]. I carried something that I'd collected back years before when I was a teenager. A Canadian two-dollar bill. I'd gone to Canada, hitchhiked into Canada, and went camping. When I got home the only money I had left was that two-dollar bill. And I'm still carrying it.

**Meyer:** You're still carrying it?

**Milks:** Yes, I have it in my pocket right now. [laughs]

**Meyer:** That's great. That's great. Maybe when we're done I can take a picture of it. ... [Milks looks for it in pocket but can't locate it.]

**Milks:** I don't think I have it.

**Meyer:** It's there someplace. I know, whenever I want to find something, it's hard to find.

**Milks:** It's not there.

**Meyer:** It's there. So I tell you what, when you find it, maybe tomorrow if you see me, let me see it.

**Milks:** All right.

**Meyer:** But tell me about the sleeping bag.

**Milks:** As you probably know, we had those mummy sleeping bags. Zipped up and very close fitting. And being in artillery we had a gun truck, so I did have this advantage. And I was never comfortable in that mummy sleeping bag. So I got my blanket and somewhere I got a German army blanket that was clean. And I kind of folded those over, laid them down on the floor, so they were half blankets but they had several layers. You always pick up stuff – there's a lot of junk on the battlefield – and I picked up a couple shelter halves to make a cover for them. And I found some thread, heavy thread in a German house. And I didn't have a needle, but off of a C-ration can I took one of those deals, and I straightened it out and I filed it down to a needle, and of course it had an eye, and I used that as a needle to sew the sleeping bag.

[TIME 48:15]

**Meyer:** That is great!

**Milks:** So I had a warm sleeping bag [laughs].

**Meyer:** You had a warm sleeping bag. That's great to take that top and file it down. Now, I understand you won the Bronze Star? What did you do?

**Milks:** Well I did but I don't-- [laughs]

**Meyer:** Yeah, a lot of people feel different things about the Bronze Star. My father had a Bronze Star too. It's not about tooting your own horn. Oh, there it is.

**Milks:** There's the famous two-dollar bill.

**Meyer:** There's the two-dollar bill. I'll let you-- There it is.

**Milks:** Oh boy, this is really fragile, Irma [wife].

**Irma:** Oh, be careful.

**Meyer:** Just be careful. You don't have to open it up. There it is. That's great. There it is, the two-dollar bill. I'm honored to see it. Thank you very much. I'll give you some time to put it away.

**Milks:** You know, the Bronze Star was, I didn't charge any machine gun or anything like that. I just – the citation just reads, “heroic and steadfast of duty under enemy fire.”

**Meyer:** That's what you did. You talked about shells hitting close. Do you remember any particularly close call?

**Milks:** Well, you talk about being afraid. This is one time I almost came to pieces. One night we were exchanging fire with the Germans and they had us pinned down, our range down better than we had theirs. And there were shells hitting close. And one hit I'd say within maybe ten feet of me and actually splashed mud on me. It did not explode, obviously. And it was a 170 mm., and the next morning the thing was laying down there. And anyway, that thing hit. And that's one I didn't hear at all. And they shut down our firing and I got in the foxhole and I was actually trembling. [laughs] And it took me a while to get myself under control.

**Meyer:** What did you do to get yourself under control?

**Milks:** I don't know. I guess — I lit a cigarette, I know. And I was all covered up with a cigarette, and just after a time I just calmed down.

**Meyer:** If something like that hit ten feet from anyone now they'd be running down the street for a month. (laughs)

**Milks:** And there were some others that hit close, but not as bad as that one.

**Meyer:** Why didn't it explode, were you just lucky?

**Milks:** I looked at it the next morning. The fuse was actually just kind of bent back. I'd say it was just a faulty fuse. That would be my guess.

**Meyer:** I also know that some of the people making, it was like in *Schindler's List*. Some of the people sabotaged them.

**Milks:** Yes. You think about that. you think about that, yes.

**Meyer:** I think that maybe some of, some little girl someplace in Holland making that shell—

**Milks:** Yeah, might have sabotaged it.

**Meyer:** Sabotaged it. Where were you after, when Victory in Europe Day came, V-E Day came, where were you then?

[TIME 53:22]

**Milks:** I think we were in the Ruhr Pocket area. But it was almost an anticlimax. The fighting had stopped, and we were just on guard but nothing was going on. We weren't taking any aggressive action.

**Meyer:** So there was a time when you fired your last shell?

**Milks:** Yeah. Uh huh.

**Meyer:** Did you know at that time that it was just--

**Milks:** Well, yes because I think just a couple days before we were, Germans were just trying to surrender. And we were a small artillery outfit, and the infantry was trying to catch up to us [laughs] and come behind. And we didn't have any ways of taking prisoners. And we just told the Germans to keep on going.

**Meyer:** So they would run up to you?

**Milks:** Yeah, they'd want to surrender.

**Meyer:** And you'd just send them—

**Milks:** Well we, yeah. As a matter of fact, there's one story. A couple of guys went into a German beer garden. They got some beer, they came out, and they said, "You know, there's two German soldiers in there drinking beer." [laughs] They said they didn't bother one another [laughs].

**Meyer:** That's interesting. What did you do when you had time for relaxation? Did you read? What did you do?

**Milks:** You know what I have to say is that being in combat, it's 90% boredom [laughs] and maybe 10% terror. And when there was nothing to do, there was nothing to do. I mean, I just felt that was a big mistake. I would have enjoyed having a book or something to read, but there was just absolutely nothing to do.

**Meyer:** Did you just stay with your own gun crew?

**Milks:** Oh yes, pretty much. Yeah. Well, on the other hand I knew some guys, friends from other outfits that we at times when there might be a lull or before we were going to move on I'd see some other guys, or make an effort to see them. But mostly it was with your own outfit.

**Meyer:** How was the food?

**Milks:** Food? Not good. Not good.

**Meyer:** Was there anything you particularly disliked?

**Milks:** Well, I think there's mostly, there's nothing I really did like. The C- and K-rations weren't good, and we got quite often in the artillery what they called B-rations.

**Meyer:** What were those?

**Milks:** They'd be warm, but they'd be like canned stuff. Canned food, canned meat that would be heated up. Oh, eggs.

**Meyer:** Like powdered egg?

**Milks:** Powdered eggs, yes, powdered eggs. And you know the cooks, they really didn't have a whole lot to work with, so the food wasn't good.

**Meyer:** Wasn't good. When you look back, who were the most important people to you? Who was the most important person during your time in service?

**Milks:** Do you mean when I was in combat?

**Meyer:** When you were in combat or when you were, whatever that means to you. If it changes, it changes.

[TIME 58:00]

**Milks:** The most important person, you ask? You know, I suppose I'd have to say your good friends. I can't think of an officer or sergeant or anything that was most important to me.

**Meyer:** What were some of your friends' names?

**Milks:** Oh, let's see. Well, Morton Katz (PH), and – oh boy [laughs]

**Irma Milks:** The two that you met in Oklahoma

**Milks:** Oh yeah, John Barber (PH) and Bill Clark (PH).

**Meyer:** Mrs. Milks, what would you like Mr. Milks to talk about that he hasn't mentioned yet?

**Irma Milks:** What he did in Paris when the other guys were going to the burlesque shows.

**Meyer:** What did you do in Paris?

**Milks:** Oh, lord [laughs]. Well, I think they were doing more than going to burlesque shows. But I actually went to the Eiffel Tower and some of the famous spots like the Louvre, and some like that. I had to go by myself. [laughs] I wasn't much for going and sitting drinking or anything like that.

**Meyer:** Have you been back to Paris?

**Milks:** Oh yes. I've been back there three times, I guess. To France.

**Meyer:** I used to live in New York in the '70s and '80s. And there are certain paintings I'll go back to in the Metropolitan Museum, and I feel like they're a friend who saw me at different times. Is there anything about Paris that you go and you sort of remember?

**Milks:** Well, there's one huge thing I always remember about it. I guess The Coronation or something, Napoleon? The huge, huge painting – I remember that. And of course I do remember seeing the Mona Lisa. As a matter of fact, when I was in there, there were people gathered around that. And I don't know, for some reason the guard, they have a guard there, and he asked people to get away because I was trying to take a picture, and he asked people to get away so I could take a picture. [laughs]

**Irma Milks:** It gave you a taste of wanting to travel more.

**Milks:** Oh yes.

**Meyer:** So how did the war change you?

**Milks:** Oh, I think I matured. I think it's very possible that I don't know if I would have finished college if I hadn't gone in the army, got that experience. That certainly changed me. Another thing, it might sound kind of silly, but I grew up in Michigan and my family were hunters and I grew up going hunting with my family. And even though they were just animals after I got back that was something that just didn't appeal to me anymore.

**Meyer:** You didn't want to shoot anything.

**Milks:** That's right. I didn't want to shoot anything.

**Meyer:** No, that's not silly. I've heard that before.

**Milks:** Have you?

**Meyer:** People who grew up in hunting families don't want to shoot. The sport of it's gone.

**Milks:** I think just growing up was a big change. [laughs]

**Meyer:** Would you recommend military service to people now?

**Milks:** I would, yes. As a matter of fact, I think either military service or some sort of service for the country, whether it be Peace Corps, or something like civilian conservation, or military, I think everyone should have it. I think it should be mandatory for people.

**Meyer:** I've heard that, too. Some people say that.

**Milks:** It's something to make them appreciate their country.

**Meyer:** Because of working with the 95<sup>th</sup>, when I came back to Los Angeles one time I got someone's recording and he had just passed, so his wife was happy to hear his voice. But I said to the Los Angeles library, can you give me a place to record people just so that they could sit down and do what we're doing now. So I've been doing that for a few years. And a kid came in, twelve-year-old, who said that, I asked him about fourteen months ago, I said, "Do you know who Hitler was?" And he said, "I think he's a baseball player." (Milks laughs) And I said, "No, not that Hitler. Another Hitler." And he said, "No. I don't know." And so I said that to some people. And some people said, "Well, why do we have to study history anyway?" What would you say? Why should people know about World War II?

[TIME: 1:03:47]

**Milks:** Well, it's obvious it was such an important part of my life. But I think that they shouldn't know just about WWII, but they should know about American history. Not just wars, but about American history. Like John Quincy Adams was talking about tonight. And I think that if a person is required to give some service to their country they might be more conscious of American history. My gosh, for WWII if it hadn't been for the allies, America, Britain, I don't know what kind of world we'd have right now. If we hadn't gotten into WWII the Germans might have very well won.

**Meyer:** Just in winding up, is there any other thing?

**Irma Milks:** I think, Roy, to wind it up, we went to the opening of the WWII monument. We were there, and had very, very close seats to that, so it was very impressive.

**Milks:** For whatever reason, we had written and gotten tickets for it, and for whatever reason that, we got there and we were looking for where we were supposed to sit. And this guy looked at our passes and he said, "Oh congratulations, you're up here." And my gosh we were right in front of the stage, about—

**Irma Milks:** Nine rows back.

**Milks:** Nine rows back or something like that. And I still don't know why we were privileged to sit there.

**Irma Milks:** Some of the people that had won different medals were sitting up there.

**Milks:** But it was wonderful.

**Meyer:** It took them long enough to build it.

**Milks:** Oh, yeah. Yeah.

**Meyer:** But it was good that it's there. Now this question sometimes, I asked Ken Burns' producer, he had come when he was doing the war series. And I asked her what her favorite question was. And she said, "Tell me a story you've never told anyone before." And I said, "Well, you know, you're Ken Burns and people come in in front of you, so they're going to do it." I said, "I'll ask the question, but what do you suggest? She said, "Well, tell them to close their eyes, take a deep breath, tell them what you're going to ask them and ask them the question. And if anything comes to mind—anything comes to mind, doesn't have to be about combat, can be about anything, just say if anything comes to mind." So I said, "Okay, I promise you. At the end of a nice interview, I'll ask the question." And sometimes something does. Today something did to someone. So if you want to try it, all you do is you close your eyes. Take a deep breath. Let it out. And I'll say, tell me a story you never told anyone before.

**Milks:** Well [to Irma], you've never heard this story. In our artillery battery, each gun had a bazooka man. And one night they were expecting the Germans to attack. And so the bazooka guys had to go out in front. And we could hear activity. And we dug our foxhole. And the loader, Carmen Benacci (PH) was the loader, and we were there. And I said, "Carmen, if those tanks try to come through we're just going to get off one shot." I said, "There's no use both of us being killed. So, I want you to load it, and just go back."

**[TIME 1:10:50]**

Which he did. And I just stuck it out there all that night. But I had the strangest experience. Of course, I was afraid. But at some point in time it wasn't that I wasn't afraid anymore but I was more accepting of the whole thing. And this is the strange thing, Irma. That it was almost physical, like I felt this come over me. And I felt at ease. That doesn't mean I wasn't afraid, but I was accepting of it. And I just stuck it out that night. Nothing ever happened, though. There was some small fire coming over, but nothing ever happened. So that's the one story. You've never heard that. Never told it to anyone, matter of fact.

**Irma Milks:** Well, you didn't tell very many stories at all until after we went to the first of these reunions. And he met up with his buddies. And that night we all sat around and they started telling stories. And that's the first time that I heard him say anything. And we three ladies were smart enough that evening to shut our mouths so that they could talk. And they did.

**Milks:** But anyway, that's my story. It might sound odd to you but it was almost like a physical experience.

**Meyer:** Someone else had told me something like that one time. He's gone now. A guy named Bill Lacey had told me about that sort of acceptance.

**Milks:** Yeah.

**Meyer:** Well, Mr. Milks, I can't tell you what a pleasure it's been.

**Milks:** Well, thank you for listening. My goodness [laughs]

**Meyer:** Sure. I'll just close now. Is there anything else you want to say?

**Milks:** Nothing else, no. I've probably talked too much.

**Meyer:** No, not a bit. Not one word. And this is David Meyer, son of Earl D. Meyer, Company H, 379<sup>th</sup>, 95<sup>th</sup> Infantry. And it is, gosh, 9:30 I think, and I've had the great pleasure of talking to – Mr. Milks could you say your name again?

**Milks:** Roy Milks.

**Meyer:** And what company were you in?

**Milks:** Battery A, 920th Field Artillery.

**Meyer:** 920<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery. And also at this table is Mrs. Milks, who is a wonderful wife. And thank you very much for coming. Take care.

1:11:10

[End Session.]